



Changing images of favorite schools after the student admission system reform in Indonesia

Janu Arlinwibowo¹; Sri Fajar Martono^{1*}; Ikhya Ulumudin²; Hermanto Waruwu²; Yufriidawati²; Yunita Murdiyaningrum²; Gupita Nadindra Fatima³; Benjamin Leong Tack Khang⁴

¹National Research and Innovation Agency, Indonesia

²Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology, Indonesia

³National Yang Ming Chiao Tung University, Taiwan

⁴International Transnational Education Association, China

*Corresponding Author. E-mail: srifajarm@gmail.com

ARTICLE INFO

Article History

Submitted:

15 August 2024

Revised:

26 September 2024

Accepted:

27 September 2024

Keywords

school labeling; favorite school; student admission; school zoning

Scan Me:



ABSTRACT

The study aims to unearth public perceptions of the label of favorite schools after the implementation of student admission reform in Indonesia, namely the zoning system, and to explore the underlying causes. Adopting a qualitative method with a phenomenological approach, this study involved participants from nine provincial education services, nine regency education services, 72 teachers, and 72 parents. Data collected through in-depth interviews and focus groups reveal three distinctive perceptions of favorite schools. The first view posits that after the implementation of the zoning system, the quality among schools is relatively similar, indicating that the new policy is effective in reducing educational disparity. The second sees that some favorite schools persist, but there is a narrowing educational disparity among schools. The third view, the majority, maintains the belief of the importance of favorite schools and maintains the idea that sending their children to these schools is important to secure a better future. Erasing the label of favorite schools is not an easy endeavor since these schools have created long-lasting positive images in the public landscape. The result of the study will add to the discussion of the impact of the new applied school zone system on public perception of favorite schools and inform policymakers regarding the impact of educational policy enacted.

This is an open access article under the [CC-BY-SA](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/) license.



To cite this article (in APA style):

Arlinwibowo, J., Martono, S., Ulumudin, I., Waruwu, H., Yufriidawati, Y., Murdiyaningrum, Y., Fatima, G., & Khang, B. (2024). Changing images of favorite schools after the student admission system reform in Indonesia. *REID (Research and Evaluation in Education)*, 10(2), 199-213.
doi:<https://doi.org/10.21831/reid.v10i2.77035>

INTRODUCTION

The educational quality disparity is one of the fundamental problems of education in Indonesia. This issue needs massive orchestrated interventions to ensure educational equity for the entire population (Muttaqin, 2018). Disparities in the quality of education are reflected in various aspects of education provision, ranging from factors related to the education process, such as the quality of teachers and the availability of learning facilities and infrastructure, to the quality of educational outcomes shown in the quality of graduates' competencies when continuing their education or entering the workforce (Azzizah, 2015). Inter-regional comparisons show that disparities in the quality of education continue to occur, with some regions achieving higher results than others (Ohno, 2019). Disparities in the quality of education are also evident at the school level and give rise to schools that are superior in quality compared to other schools, especially in terms of academic performance (Simorangkir et al., 2019). These schools become the dream of parents to send their children to school, and these schools are often referred to as favorite or elite schools. Even

so, in the Indonesian context, the term favorite school or elite school is not a term that is deliberately labeled by the government, but these terms emerged from the public as the appreciation for high-quality schools (Joko et al., 2020; Simorangkir et al., 2019).

History witnessed the emergence of schools considered superior in quality compared to other schools, commonly viewed as favorite schools (Liu et al., 2020). Various factors underlie why this view has emerged in the public (Shiferaw & Kenea, 2024). One of the factors is related to the quality of graduates of these schools. Parents view favorite schools as schools whose graduates enter excellent schools at the level above or continue to excellent universities, such as entering majors that are in high demand. Another factor is the quality of facilities and infrastructure owned by the school. Not a few parents consider schools with well-designed and multi-story buildings completed with modern facilities as excellent schools. The factor of student activities or activities offered by the school is also a consideration for parents today. There is a change in parents' mindset where schools are considered high in quality if they have many varied student activity programs to accommodate the talents and interests of the students, including religious-based programs.

Favorite schools do not necessarily emerge as a straightforward process. From the perspective of educational demand, the mindset of seeing education as the main investment for their children's future is one of the main causes of school favoritism (Joko et al., 2020; Simorangkir et al., 2019). In terms of educational supply, the main factor that cannot be denied related to the emergence of these schools is the government's effort to boost the quality of education through the establishment of model schools. In the midst of 1990, the central government through the role of the Ministry of Education (MoE) involved the local government, deliberately creating high-performing schools through the project of model schools or pilot schools (Darmaningtyas, 2015). With a pilot school in a region, it is expected that the schools can facilitate their neighborhood schools to improve their quality.

Parents develop particular criteria in selecting schools for their children (Ashraf, 2012). Educational quality is the most considered criterion (Hofflinger et al., 2020; Ibrahim et al., 2014). The quality of the school is often represented by the school's academic performance, which is shown through students' academic test scores (Ibrahim et al., 2014). The public seems to accept and maintain the idea of favorite schools in their neighborhood. The belief that sending their children to favorite schools is a very important investment is firmly instilled in parents' minds. As a result, schools that are considered favorites are always in high demand, even far exceeding their capacity. On the other hand, schools that are not considered favorites have fewer students and even experience a shortage of students because the number of applicants is far from the capacity. Intense competition often develops into unhealthy conflict and leads to violations during the admission process. Positing that in terms of financing, parents are willing to spend more to get a better quality of education, including reserving a bench in an elite school (Cheung et al., 2022).

In 2017, the Ministry of Education launched a new system for student admission called the zone-based school admission policy. In this new system, student admission is based mainly on the proximity of the student's residence to the school institution (Ardi et al., 2023; Erlangga et al., 2023). This policy replaced the former student admission system which placed students' national examination score or academic achievement as the basis of selecting potential students, without considering students' residence or origins (Erlangga et al., 2023). The main purpose of the new system is to bring the students closer to their destination schools, thereby strengthening the education ecosystem. In addition, the implementation of the policy is expected to narrow the quality of between schools, hence all schools in the future will have the same quality consequently erasing the perspective of school favoritism (Rohman et al., 2023). Another consideration of the implementation of the school zoning system is the idea of reducing the traffic issues in the cities since most favorite schools are located in the center of the cities (Habiby & Fiatin, 2019). As a socially inflicted policy, inevitably, the zone-based policy results in public debate. A handful of problems emerged from the implementation of this policy, such as the refusal of the parents toward the policy and the emergence of technical problems during the admission process. Therefore, The

MoE continuously evaluates the regulation and enhances the quality of the implementation to halt the negative impact on the public.

Previous research has been conducted regarding the implementation of a zone-based school admission policy. [Ardi et al. \(2023\)](#) reveal some challenges of the implementation of this policy including the issue of transparency during the process of registering new students, the over-animo of high-performing students in particular schools, and the lack of parent awareness and active participation. Highlighting the impact of the new system, there are three issues that the government must address regarding the impact of encompassing the drop in the quality of the students due to the absence of standards for selecting students and lack of parents' knowledge regarding the new admission system due to the minimal socialization ([Erlangga et al., 2023](#)). A study conducted in Yogyakarta, one of the high-performing cities in Indonesia, concluded that the implementation of a zone-based school admission policy resulted in the students composition in the schools, thus forcing the teachers to change their teaching methods and lowering the learning material difficulty level ([SMERU, 2022](#)).

As explained above, one of the objectives of the implementation of the zone-based school admission policy that is always mentioned by policymakers is to eliminate school favoritism in the community. Unfortunately, research on the issue is still lacking. Aiming to fill the gap, this study aims to examine one of Indonesia's recent education reforms, namely zone-based school admission policy, in influencing the mindset of the parents regarding the label of favorite schools and the perception of equality of education.

METHOD

This research is qualitative research with a phenomenological approach, research that focuses on capturing the personal experiences of informants in a phenomenon study ([Creswell & Creswell, 2013](#)). The phenomenological approach was selected because the approach has a character that matches the research objectives, namely revealing social phenomena related to the perception of favorite schools in the community. This approach can facilitate researchers to develop honest relationships with the informants in their setting. Accordingly, it allows the generation of rich and genuine perspectives held by the informants. Moreover, the phenomenological approach emphasized respect for informants' knowledge and experiences.

The research was conducted from June to December 2023 in nine provinces in Indonesia, namely Daerah Istimewa Yogyakarta, Daerah Khusus Ibukota (DKI) Jakarta, Bengkulu, Kalimantan Barat, Kalimantan Timur, Sulawesi Selatan, Bali, Nusa Tenggara Timur, dan Lampung. The locations were determined purposively considering the dynamics of the implementation of the policy and educational disparity index (see [Table 1](#)). The research team selected provinces with low and high disparities in education quality based on data from MoE. Also considering provinces with a minimum and maximal conflict related to the implementation of zone-based student admission policy identified based on mass media coverage.

[Table 1](#). Selected Samples' Characteristics

No.	Location	Educational Quality Disparity	Level of Conflict
1	Daerah Istimewa Yogyakarta	high	maximal
2	DKI Jakarta	low	minimal
3	Bengkulu	low	maximal
4	Kalimantan Barat	high	maximal
5	Kalimantan Timur	low	minimal
6	Sulawesi Selatan	high	maximal
7	Bali	low	minimal
8	Nusa Tenggara Timur	high	minimal
9	Lampung	high	minimal

To gain a comprehensive perception, this study involves three categories of informants, namely government officials, teachers, and parents. In each province, informants consisted of one provincial educational staff, one regency educational staff, eight teachers from different schools, and eight parents from different schools. The informant selection was based on their involvement in the student admission process with the assumption that this involvement would foster their knowledge regarding the public aspiration on favorite schools. The informants from the government and teachers were staff who were directly involved in the student's admission process. Parents were randomly selected since every parent had experience in overseeing their children's admission process. In total this research involved nine informants from provincial educational authorities, nine informants from regency educational authorities, 72 teachers, and 72 parents.

Data collection was conducted through in-depth interviews and focus groups. In-depth interviews were performed to gather information from the staff of local educational services guided by the interview guidelines prepared by the research team. Focus group discussions were conducted to collect information from teachers and parents. This method was selected due to its efficiency in collecting data from one community and its depth and comprehensiveness. Focus group discussions were conducted face-to-face at each site. The parent's and the teacher's focus group discussions were conducted separately to ensure that each participant expressed their opinion comfortably.

Each data collection process was recorded with the permission of the informant. The interview and focus group discussion records were converted into transcripts to conserve the intact conveyed ideas from the informant, their emotional content, and nuances of the interview process. In this way, it was expected that the interpretation of the analysis results would reveal the phenomenon in depth and comprehensively. The transcript results were collected and analyzed using the analysis model proposed by Creswell. The data analysis carried out in this research covers several stages: (1) organizing the data, (2) reading the transcripts and providing various important notes, (3) describing, classifying, and interpreting the data into codes and themes, (4) interpreting the results of the analysis, and (5) presenting and visualizing the results of the analysis (Creswell & Creswell, 2013). To facilitate the analysis process, Nvivo software was used. This software facilitated researchers to conveniently carry out systematic analysis, create consistent coding, facilitate the classification process, and carry out accurate data recall. In this way, the potential of data could be utilized optimally. Nvivo was utilized due to its capacity to facilitate online collaborative work between researchers and its capability to deal with abundant qualitative data. Some characteristics were not found in alternative data management software.

During this study, the researchers emphasized respecting informants' genuine opinions and perspectives they held. Since the issue of research was sensitive, sometimes it uncovered the practices of violation of regulation on the student admission system. The researchers were not in a position to judge right or wrong regarding this idea or action.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

The Dynamic of the Idea of School Favoritism After Student Admission System Reform

The public's mindset on school favoritism has become one aspect that has been tried to be eliminated through the new student admission system which takes into account zoning elements in Indonesia for at least the last seven years. The implementation of a zone-based admission system is expected to avoid the clustering of students with high academic capability in a particular school. In the future, it is expected that all schools will have the same quality of student input, and accordingly, the school quality disparity will become less significant. This measure is a government concrete step in seeking to implement one of the points in Pancasila, namely social justice for all Indonesian people through the equal availability of quality schools.

Considering the period of education schooling stage in Indonesia, namely elementary school is completed in six years, junior high school is completed in three years, and senior high school also completed in three years, the implementation of the 7th year of the new student enrollment system is the right moment to evaluate the impact of this educational reform because all students at their respective grade are the result the new system of student admission which takes into account zoning elements. Examining the mindset changes related to school favoritism among the public is a compelling issue. Figure 1 is an analytical map of the findings of public thought regarding the issue of school favoritism.

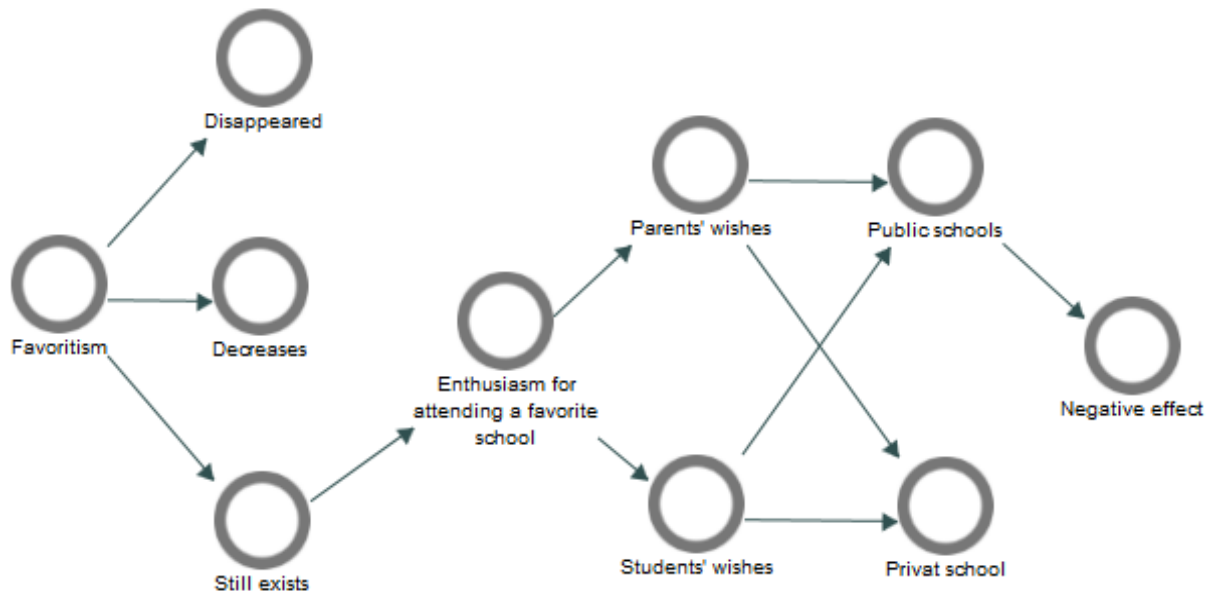


Figure 1. Map of Public Views Regarding School Favoritism

Data collected from nine provinces reveals that the public perceptions of school favoritism are various. Data indicates that the public's mindset regarding school favoritism is threefold. The first group represents people who no longer think there are favorite schools, the second group thinks that favorite schools still exist but no longer dominate as before, and the third group is those who think that favorite schools still exist today.

The first group stated that due to the implementation of the student enrollment system which took into account zoning, all schools had relatively the same quality. Thus, the first group does not hesitate to send their children to schools located near their home and does not have the ambition to attend a particular school. The second group stated that conditions related to school favoritism had changed a lot, but not completely. This group still prioritizes their children to enter certain schools that are considered to have a reputation for high academic performance. However, this expectation is not too strong so if this expectation is not met then there will be no disappointment. They assume that almost all schools have the same quality, and if there are disparities, they can still be tolerated. This condition is very different from 10 years ago when my favorite schools had much higher quality compared to other schools. In this way, not being able to study at the expected school does not result in disappointment.

Interestingly, the third group represents the majority of the people. Most of the people still think that the image of their favorite school continues until today. This group manifests its assumptions by showing high effort in sending their children to certain schools that have a favorite image. At the extreme, some parents justify any means to enroll their children and show excessive expression, including excessive disappointment when their children are not accepted. Data also reveal that the majority of respondents stated that the labels of favorite schools were difficult to erase.

The fact that the majority of people think the label of favorite schools still exists is shown by the fact that there is still a multitude of people's interest in favorite schools. The new system of student admission in Indonesia uses four channels, namely zone, achievement, affirmation, and parental transfer. Every year, parents always try to maximize these four routes in enrolling their children in some targeted favorite schools. This shows that schools that are labeled as favorites have a denser enrollment quota for each channel compared to non-favorite schools.

Expectations for attending a favorite school are generally two-pronged, that is pursuing a public favorite school and attending a private favorite school. To be accepted to public schools, prospective students need to show multitudinous effort to study so that they have high academic grades and win academic competitions as the ideal pathway. This strategy certainly requires that prospective students have very strong motivation. Parents who are not comfortable with the new student enrollment system in public schools will fight over private schools that have the favorite label.

Some informants from Bengkulu, Berau, Yogyakarta, Lampung, Makassar, Tabanan, and Pontianak express that the idea of school favoritism is still widely accepted. The following are some excerpts of their statements.

The parents' line of thought is that their children attend a good school. It starts as follows: SD Ungaran for the elementary school, for junior high, it is SMP 5, and then for the senior high it is SMA 3. (One parent from City of Yogyakarta)

... and the image of targeted schools is favorite schools and elite schools. For parents and the children, that image cannot be erased even if the government tries to erase it. (One staff of Bengkulu Provincial Educational Service)

... when some people are asking, "Where is the school of your child?" When answered that the school is A (a favorite school), then their expression indicates admiration, but if answered that the school is Z (a non-favorite school) then their reaction is different, expressing a demeaning attitude. (One of the student enrollment committee members in Jakarta)

In public sentiment, favorite schools still exist; this already patterned through generations. (One of the school admission committee members in Kupang)

Another dynamic is that excessive expectations of the public favorite schools are creating violations by some parents. The strong urge to attend a favorite school often makes them ignore the norm and try to find loopholes in the rules. The practice of cheating or capitalizing loopholes in the related regulation is mostly found in two channels of the student admission system, namely zoning and achievement channels. On the zoning channel, schools labeled as favorites are invaded by students with fake residential status since the school and home proximity is the main basis of the enrollment system. Some people use the strategy of registering their children into the household registry of other families located near the school to make their children's residential status closer to their favorite schools. This situation occurs in almost every part of Indonesia, especially in urban areas. Some cases indicate that this practice was developed into a for-profit business by people who live around some public favorite schools. They offer residential registry services which are subject to varying rates at each location.

This deviant practice occurred in all the research locations with the differing factor being the massiveness of the practice. The following are some statements of research informants regarding this practice.

During the registration phase when I asked a student where his home is, he replied it was near SMPN 2, on Widodo Alley. But now when I asked him the same question, it was near Jeruju he replied. Why is it changing? He said that during the registration phase, his name was put in another family registry who lived near the school. (One of the student admission committee members in West Kalimantan)

So parents are smart now. When their children enter the first grade of junior high, their names are moved to another family registry to enroll at a favorite school. They plan it well in advance. (One of the student admission committee members in Bengkulu)

...there was data manipulation. I do not know exactly, but there's news like that. They made a new family registry. The purpose is to enroll and be accepted in the targeted school. That is one kind of fraud conducted there. (One parent from Berau Regency)

Regarding the achievement channel of the student enrollment system, the enthusiasm of prospective students to enroll at the schools with the favorite label is greater compared to that at non-favorite schools. In general, the achievement channels are divided into academic and non-academic channels. The academic channel considers the track record of prospective students' academic learning outcomes at previous schools, whereas the non-academic channel includes the portfolio of competitions and various awards attained. Each local government develops policies for regulating these achievement channels, including a more detailed definition of achievement. However, there are several findings indicating irresponsible practices in the achievement channel.

Through the academic achievement channel, for example, the students accepted in their favorite schools are students with high academic scores. This shows that school favoritism is still well-maintained in many communities. The first case is the school's practice of giving the highest possible grades to their students so that after graduating they can potentially continue their education at their favorite schools. This is deliberately practiced by some schools to increase the school's reputation. For a school, if many of its graduates are accepted and continue their education in their favorite schools, then the students' former schools will gain an advantage by attracting prospective students. However, this situation certainly makes the educational situation more complicated because the learning achievement scores become biased and cannot be used as a basis for diagnosing students' abilities.

The other often-found case is the practice of cheating through non-academic achievement channels. This pathway considers achievements from student competitions and other awards as proven by certificates. It is revealed that many prospective students or their parents submitted fake certificates. Also often found is the attachment of an activity certificate that cannot be accounted for. For example, there are many competitions held in cyberspace where all participants are guaranteed to receive an award. These non-credible competitions are carried out by some random people who respond to the need for certificates, thus developing it as a for-profit business opportunity. This practice of manipulating the enrollment requirements also occurred in all research locations varied by its massiveness. The following are excerpts from some informants regarding the case.

... the fraud occurred at the school level, including in non-academic achievement channels. I think it happened in all places. For example, some people publish certificates of achievement on their own. The students do not have special achievements. (One of the personnel of Province South Sulawesi Educational Service)

I argue that the selection system on achievement channels should not be based on the report score since it does not represent the truth of a student's academic competence. New students from this channel showed poor performance." (One student enrollment committee member in Makassar City)

Yogyakarta Province developed a local standard academic test to address the problem of rapport scores not representing student academic competence. (One student enrollment committee member in Yogyakarta City)

Factors Underlying the Persistent Idea of School Favoritism

Why does school favoritism still exist even though equal distribution of student input through the student enrollment system which takes into account zoning has been implemented since 7 years ago? Simple logic leads researchers to conclude that some other factors have an impact beyond the initiative of equalizing the quality of student input. The reasons underlying the per-

sistent idea of school favoritism are an issue that needs to be mapped out. This mapping is very important to facilitate policymakers in developing strategies to accelerate the equal distribution of educational quality and formulate appropriate policies to anticipate various negative impacts resulting from regulatory clashes with the strong image of school favoritism. Figure 2 illustrates the reasons underlying the public's persistent idea of school favoritism in Indonesia.

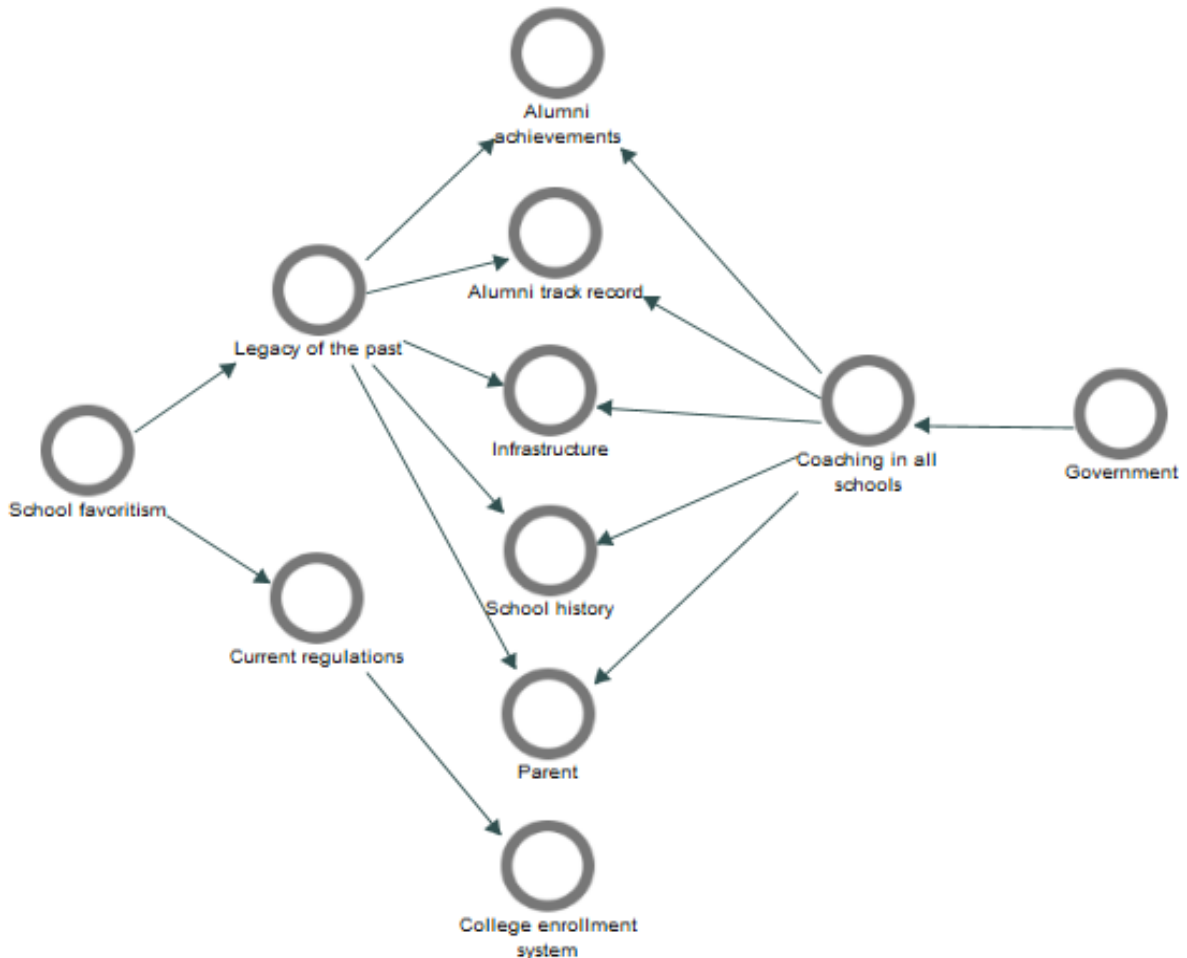


Figure 2. The Underlying Causes of Persistent School Favoritism After Student Admission Reform

Data reveal that there are two main causal factors underlying the persistent idea of school favoritism, namely the factor attributed to the school's legacy from the past and the factor related to current regulations. Previous school legacies are related to school performance in the past, and thus currently cannot be altered by the government. Current regulation refers to the regulation guiding the university or higher education admission system.

The first aspect of school legacy that causes the image of a favorite school to persist is the former students' achievements. So far, there are still here are still many schools that are famous for their alumnus' outstanding achievements, for example, schools that are prominent for their achievements in Science Olympiad competitions. Some schools are famous for winning sports events, such as basketball and badminton competitions. Some schools are well known for their research achievements, and so on. This image of identity emerged a long time ago and continues to be passed down for generations so that this identity continues to be maintained.

The second aspect is the track record of the school alumni. It cannot be denied that in the past, favorite schools had a majority of students with high intelligence or academic capacity and talent in their respective fields. Thus, it is not surprising that the alumni of these schools have

become great and famous people. When someone becomes successful, his previous school identity is always attached, making the school recognized also as a successful institution. For example, for a successful political leader, the identity of having studied in a particular educational institution will always be attached. The alumni's success record is also almost certainly used by the school for material promotion. Schools that used to have a favorite label certainly have a lot of alumni-based promotional material which makes the school continue to be considered a favorite school.

The third aspect is school facilities and infrastructure. Currently, educational development in Indonesia has shifted to a foundation of inclusiveness oriented towards equality. However, it must be acknowledged that infrastructure is still not evenly distributed among schools. There are two main reasons underlying this problem. The first reason is related to the education system in the past which allowed favorite schools to collect funding from students or parents. In this way, interest in a particular school is highly correlated with school income, which means that the school can provide infrastructure more freely. Moreover, there was a time when the education system gave more appreciation to schools with a certain reputation (in the past they were given the label of pioneering standard schools). Traces of the glory of this favorite school are still visible today, which creates a gap in facilities compared to other schools.

The fourth aspect influencing the image of a favorite school is the track of school history. The school's reputation in the past cannot be immediately erased from people's minds. Memories of favorites in the past influenced the student enrollment system. The education system in the past which allowed favorite schools to grow more fertile than other schools (achievement context) has certainly created a long track record. The track record that is built can be through achievement, reputation in sending students to continue their studies at tertiary institutions, or success in making graduates have a positive character. These reputations have been established over a long time and have made the school proud. These histories continue to stick in people's minds so that changes do not have a significant impact on their perspective.

The last aspect impacting the idea of school favoritism is the parental factor. The reason is that the student enrollment system does not merely involve students but also their parents. In this case, parents' experience and knowledge regarding the quality of a school greatly influence their choice. Favorite schools can provide better learning experiences for students so that satisfaction and pride emerge, especially after the students graduate. Facts show that such feelings often make parents determined to enroll their children in the school they attended in the past, even when their children are aspiring to attend these schools.

Yes, if I look back to RSBI (piloting school with international standard), it contributes to the labeling of favorite schools and the image is hard to erase until today. (One of the student admission committee members in Makassar City)

One parent told me that he graduated from SMPN XXX, his wife also. Thus he wanted his children to attend the same school, SMPN XXX. (One of the student admission committee members in Pontianak City)

A school becomes a favorite school because of its graduates, many of them showing great achievement. (One of the student admission committee members in Makassar City)

Our alumni community gave us support in the development of the school building and other school facilities. (One of the student admission committee members in Yogyakarta City)

The next factor contributing to the persistent image of a favorite school is the regulation of the tertiary education admission system. The system for college entrance is a system that bears public complaint since the process is still achievement-oriented and takes into account the school's reputation, in contrast to recent educational reform emphasizing student whole development not focusing only on academic aspects. Based on this system, some high schools that are considered to have a good reputation will be swamped by students who want to enter reputable colleges. It is strongly believed by the public that attending a favorite elementary school will widen the

opportunity to enroll at a favorite junior high school and accordingly open a higher opportunity to attend a favorite high school. Finally, this effort is resulting in an opportunity enrolling to a favorite college. Graduating from a favorite college means better future employment and financial life. The following is an example of a statement regarding this matter made by a member of the South Sulawesi Province Education Service.

So far there has been no comprehensive system for erasing favorite school labels. For example, there are still ranking-based school publications, so yes, there are still favorite schools, for example, the ranking accounts for the number of students entering elite universities as an indicator. Another example is the invitation system in the college entrance, some are 50%, then some are 30%, depending on the reputation of the university institution.

To minimize these factors, local educational authorities try not to discriminate against schools based on school reputation or the academic performance of their students, especially for the distribution of support funding and teacher competency upgrading programs. It is expected that this strategy will continue to improve the equality of educational quality so that over time the idea of school favoritism will disappear. In this case, the public eagerly attends schools near their residence since they also offer high-quality educational services. Some regions reported equal distribution of school facilities without considering school reputation. This region are Tabanan, Pontianak, Makassar, Lampung, Kupang, Jakarta, Yogyakarta, and Berau. Meanwhile, for the system of college entrance, the government has tried to develop several regulatory improvements in recent years. However, a formula has not yet been developed for a college admission system compatible with the student enrollment system at lower education levels. The following is an excerpt of a statement regarding this issue made by personnel of the Yogyakarta City Education Service.

For us, the education support for schools are equal, for example, local educational fund distributions are not based on school academic performance, high or low schools are the same. (One staff from Yogyakarta City Education Service)

Discussion

In 2017, the government of the Republic of Indonesia, through the Ministry of Education and Culture, carried out a major reform of the system of student admission at elementary and secondary education levels (Sulistiyosari et al., 2023). In that year, the government began to involve the residential zone aspect as one of the student enrollment criteria in more detail, explicitly, and firmly (Ariyanto & Chamidah, 2021). Of course, Indonesia is not the first country to use this system. Previously there were New Zealand (Woodfield & Gunby, 2003), the US (Reardon et al., 2012), the UK (Burgess et al., 2023), Australia (Sulistiyosari et al., 2023), Japan (Akabayashi & Naoi, 2019), Malaysia (Norsiah & Razali, 1998), and various other countries that have implemented this system and have proven to benefit. Regardless of the conditions in each country, at least the implementation of the system in Indonesia is expected to provide positive outcomes to Indonesian education, especially the ideal of providing all society with fair education by law. Until now, the new student enrollment system continues to be developed to obtain a formulation that best suits the characteristics of Indonesian society.

One of the main purposes of the zoning system is to create an equal distribution of education in Indonesia (Sulistiyosari et al., 2023) similar to other countries that implement it (Omeje et al., 2016). This responds to the phenomenon of disparities in school quality in Indonesia. The fact that the gap in education quality among schools continues to be an issue (Kurniawati et al., 2018; Muttaqin et al., 2020; Solihin & Sara, 2021; Sulisworo, 2016). The gap in school quality is a factor that hinders the fulfillment of every community's right to receive quality education. This gap means that there are schools that develop very quickly, and there are schools that develop very slowly or stuck. The existence of disparities in school quality that have been maintained over the years has resulted in the emergence of favorite schools (Ariyanto & Chamidah, 2021). Disparities in school quality are also an obstacle to implementing inclusive education (Arlinwibowo et al., 2020).

Every era always provides a legacy, including schools that previously were categorized as elite or favorite schools. They have better infrastructure than other typical schools. Several years ago, before the government could make education provision free (i.e., public schools) all schools were allowed to charge tuition fees to their students. Schools that had a favorite label certainly had a higher bargaining value so that they could charge higher fares to students (Rismita, 2018). In this way, favorite schools raised more funds so they could invest in various infrastructures more independently. The most striking condition was the International Scale-Based School Pilot Program (*Rintisan Sekolah Bertaraf Internasional*, RSBI). At that time, schools with certain prominent criteria were given the RSBI label which resulted in exclusivity (Edison, 2012). Favorite schools became RSBI and received large funding from government levies and grants so that their facilities were not at a level with non-RSBI schools (Dharmaningtias, 2013; Hendarman, 2011). Not long afterward, the program was canceled by the government due to discrimination and increased disparity. Until now, the programs taken by the government continue to be consistent in the direction of fulfilling the right to educational facilities and eliminating the label of favorite schools. However, it cannot be denied that the legacy of previous facilities still makes a difference (Herry et al., 2018). Most of the former favorite schools and RSBI still have relatively better facilities compared to non-RSBI schools.

Favorite schools have alumni with outstanding achievements. These achievement indicators are being competitive in their area of expertise and having a bright career in their profession (Meiklejohn, Riddle, et al., 2024; Samuelsson, 2023), many of whom even become public leaders (Lange et al., 2023). It cannot be denied that universities or higher education institutions still have a preference to accept students who graduated from favorite schools (Meiklejohn, Riddle, et al., 2024). In general, the alumni community at favorite schools develops a sense of pride in their school, having great achievement, and developing strong financial capability. Pride produces an attachment to one's self-image with one's former school. For example, people will more easily trust a Harvard graduate than a graduate from a university that is not their favorite (Lange et al., 2023). Achievement also has a very strong influence on public perception. When many alumni are successful, the school will have attraction because it is considered successful in educating students (Meiklejohn, Hickey, et al., 2024). Strong alumni financial capabilities will make the alumni community (foundation) pay more attention and contribute materially or financially to the school (Utami & Ruskan, 2020). In contrast, in schools where the majority of alumni are economically disadvantaged, the alumni community's ability to contribute to developing the school will certainly not be as massive as alumni at their favorite schools. A strong alumni network at favorite schools will also contribute significantly to future employment (Feldman & Wallace, 2021).

The reputation of favorite schools in general has lasted a very long time. They have been achieving this for a long time and instilling this image (Istikomah & Romadlon, 2023; Samuelsson, 2023). Society has long given labels to schools. It takes a long time to change the image of an agency under normal circumstances (unless there are extraordinary conditions), whether a favorite becomes a non-favorite or vice versa.

CONCLUSION

Three distinct group views emerged regarding the image of favorite schools after the implementation of the zone-based school admission system, namely those who view all schools, including favorite schools, have the same educational quality, those who believe that favorite schools still exist but are no longer as prominent as in the past, and those who view that attending a favorite school is still considered as a required effort to secure better future. However, among these, the third idea is the most common public view. Various reasons underlie the persistent idea of favorite schools in the public. The strongest argument is that disbanding the label of favorite schools is a complicated issue since this label has been attached to it for a long time. Over the years, favorite schools have always been connected to outstanding alumni achievements, impressive alumni track records, adequate infrastructure assets, a positive inherent image, and the pride or

satisfaction of their graduates to the point that in the future they want their children to attend these schools. These aspects are a legacy of past situations that policymakers cannot control or change. It takes a very long time for the impacts of these aspects to fade. Apart from the legacy aspect of the past, there is the impact of current regulations which causes favorite schools to still survive, namely the regulation regarding the university student enrollment system. As the public still believed, one of the channels regarding the university admission system still considers the image of a favorite school as one of the criteria for accepting new prospective students. The result of the study will add to the body of knowledge on the impact of a new system of student admission on public perception of favorite schools, also it can help inform educational policymakers in developing policy on school equality.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This research was conducted and completed with support from the collaboration between the Educational Research Center, or IPSH, the National Research and Innovation Agency, Indonesia, and the Center of Educational Standards and Policy under the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology. We would like to express our gratitude to all parties involved, including several experts in the FGD, teacher informants, parent informants, and the local government.

DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest to disclose.

REFERENCES

- Akabayashi, H., & Naoi, M. (2019). Subject variety and incentives to learn: Evidence from public high school admission policies in Japan. *Japan and the World Economy*, 52, 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.japwor.2019.100981>
- Ardi, A., Danil, M., Murni, D., Giastituti, N., Rusdinal, & Hervi, F. (2023). The implementation of student admission based on zoning in Indonesia: Problems, challenges, and solutions. *Jurnal Kependidikan: Jurnal Hasil Penelitian dan Kajian Kepustakaan di Bidang Pendidikan, Pengajaran dan Pembelajaran*, 9(3), 914–923. <https://doi.org/10.33394/jk.v9i3.8632>
- Ariyanto, R. A., & Chamidah, N. (2021). Sentiment analysis for zoning system admission policy using support vector machine and naive bayes methods. *Journal of Physics: Conference Series*, 1776(1), 1–9. <https://doi.org/10.1088/1742-6596/1776/1/012058>
- Arlinwibowo, J., Retnawati, H., Kartowagiran, B., & Mustaqim, Y. (2020). Inclusion schools in the Daerah Istimewa Yogyakarta Province, Indonesia: Regulations, facilities and aspirations of teachers. *International Journal of Early Childhood Special Education*, 13(1), 9–19. <https://doi.org/10.9756/INT-JECSE/V13I1.211002>
- Ashraf, D. (2012). Parental perceptions of school quality: Contesting the notion of quality. *Search of Relevance and Sustainability of Educational Change: An International Conference at Aga Khan University Institute for Educational Development*, 221–252. https://ecommons.aku.edu/pakistan_ied_pdck/234
- Azzizah, Y. (2015). Socio-economic factors on Indonesia education disparity. *International Education Studies*, 8(12), 218–230. <https://doi.org/10.5539/ies.v8n12p218>
- Burgess, S., Cantillon, E., Cavallo, M., Greaves, E., & Zhang, M. (2023). *School admissions in England: The rules schools choose on which pupils to admit*. University of Bristol.
- Cheung, K. S., Yiu, C. Y., & Zhang, Y. (2022). What matters more, school choices or neighbourhoods? Evidence from a socioeconomic based school zoning. *Cities*, 128, 103772. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cities.2022.103772>

- Janu Arlinwibowo, Sri Fajar Martono, Ikhya Ulumudin, Hermanto Waruwu, Yufriawati, Yunita Murdiyaningrum, Gupita Nadindra Fatima, & Benjamin Leong Tack Khang
- Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (3rd ed). SAGE Publications.
- Darmaningtyas, D. (2015). *Pendidikan yang memiskinkan [Impoverishing education]*. Intrans Publishing.
- Dharmaningtyas, D. S. (2013). Penghapusan kebijakan rintisan sekolah berstandar internasional (RSBI) [Abolition of the international standard school pilot policy]. *Politica*, 4(2), 263–285.
- Edison, E. (2012). Gugurnya kebijakan sekolah bertaraf internasional: Investasi pendidikan vs komersialisasi pendidikan [The fall of international standard school policy: Education investment vs education commercialization]. *Jurnal Kebijakan dan Administrasi Publik*, 16(2), 27–46.
- Erlangga, R., Putri, F. P., Dhoifah, A. A., Damayanti, M. A., Tunggawijaya, W., & Rafsanjani, F. A. (2023). School zone policy system evaluation and its effects towards Indonesian education. *Pedagogia Jurnal Ilmu Pendidikan*, 21(1), 67–78. <https://doi.org/10.17509/pdgia.v21i1.56225>
- Feldman, J., & Wallace, J. (2021). Costs and benefits: Scholarship students' reflective accounts of attending an elite secondary school. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 107, 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijer.2021.101748>
- Habiby, W. N., & Fiatin, S. N. (2019). Persepsi masyarakat dan dampak sistem zonasi untuk jenjang sekolah dasar di Kecamatan Serengan Kota Surakarta [Society's perception and impact of zoning system for primary school in Serengan Sub-district, Surakarta City.]. *Profesi Pendidikan Dasar*, 6(2), 225–238. <https://doi.org/10.23917/ppd.v1i2.10151>
- Hendarman, H. (2011). Kajian terhadap keberadaan dan pendanaan rintisan sekolah bertaraf internasional (RSBI) [Study of the existence and funding of international standard school pilots]. *Jurnal Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan*, 17(4), 373–382.
- Herry, A., Adhi, P., & Firmansyah. (2018). The effect of inequality of educational facilities, health, and road conditions toward income distribution in Central Java Province, Indonesia. *E3S Web of Conferences*, 73, 1–3. <https://doi.org/10.1051/e3sconf/20187310014>
- Hofflinger, A., Gelber, D., & Tellez Cañas, S. (2020). School choice and parents' preferences for school attributes in Chile. *Economics of Education Review*, 74, 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.econedurev.2019.101946>
- Ibrahim, N. M., Osman, M. M., & Bachok, S. (2014). Public school development and planning: Parents' criteria of selecting public school in Gombak District. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 153, 274–285. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2014.10.061>
- Istikomah, & Romadlon, D. A. (2023). Building trust and reputation: branding strategies of elite Muslim schools in Indonesia. In T. T. Y. Alabdullah, M. I. Awang, B. Sobirov, M. T. Multazam, & M. D. K. Wardana (Eds.), *Proceedings of the International Conference on Intellectuals' Global Responsibility (ICIGR 2022)* (vol. 750, pp. 419–425). Atlantis Press SARL. https://doi.org/10.2991/978-2-38476-052-7_46
- Joko, B. S., Fajarini, C. D., Astuti, R., & Fransisca, R. (2020). *Persepsi masyarakat terhadap sekolah yang dianggap favorit* [Society's perception of schools that are considered favorites]. Pusat Penelitian Kebijakan.
- Kurniawati, S., Suryadarma, D., Bima, L., & Yusrina, A. (2018). Education in Indonesia: A White Elephant? *Southeast Asian Economies*, 35(2), 185–199. <https://doi.org/10.1355/ae35-2e>
- Lange, N., Kisgen, S., & Faix, W. G. (2023). The elite graduate school for leadership in the future. Results of a future workshop on excellent leadership education in 2030. *Leadership, Education, Personality: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 5(1–2), 21–32. <https://doi.org/10.1365/s42681-023-00035-6>

- Janu Arlinwibowo, Sri Fajar Martono, Ikhya Ulumudin, Hermanto Waruwu, Yufridawati, Yunita Murdiyaningrum, Gupita Nadindra Fatima, & Benjamin Leong Tack Khang
- Liu, X., Qin, F., Zhou, X., Hu, X., & Zhang, Y. (2020). Are opportunities to equalize elite high schools discriminatory? Evidence from a quasi-experimental design. *Asia Pacific Education Review*, 21(3), 351–364. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12564-020-09628-y>
- Meiklejohn, C., Hickey, A., & Riddle, S. (2024). ‘It comes with more baggage than prestige’: Deferred culpability and disavowal among elite boys’ school alumni. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 45(1), 29–41. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01596306.2023.2224244>
- Meiklejohn, C., Riddle, S., & Hickey, A. (2024). ‘Everything was going to be really easy for me’: Elite schooling, old boys, and transitions to university. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 43(1), 196–210. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2023.2218800>
- Muttaqin, T. (2018). Determinants of unequal access to and quality of education in Indonesia. *Jurnal Perencanaan Pembangunan: The Indonesian Journal of Development Planning*, 2(1), 1–23. <https://doi.org/10.36574/jpp.v2i1.27>
- Muttaqin, T., Wittek, R., Heyse, L., & Van Duijn, M. (2020). The achievement gap in Indonesia? Organizational and ideological differences between private Islamic schools. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, 31(2), 212–242. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09243453.2019.1644352>
- Norsiah, N., & Razali, M. (1998). The location of schools in urban area: Some planning implications. *Jurnal Alam Bina*, 1(1), 34–41.
- Ohno, R. (2019). Study on regional disparity of academic achievement in Indonesia. *Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research*, 258, 212–215. <https://doi.org/10.2991/icream-18.2019.43>
- Omeje, J. C., Egwa, E. I., & Adikwu, V. O. (2016). Impact of quota system and catchment area policy on the university admissions in North Central Nigeria. *SAGE Open*, 6(2), 1–8. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244016654951>
- Reardon, S. F., Grewal, E. T., Kalogrides, D., & Greenberg, E. (2012). Brown fades: The end of court-ordered school desegregation and the resegregation of American Public Schools. *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, 31(4), 876–904. <https://doi.org/10.1002/pam.21649>
- Rismita, R. (2018). The implementation of tuition-free school policy using stake’s countenance evaluation model. *Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research*, 174, 514–517. <https://doi.org/10.2991/ice-17.2018.110>
- Rohman, A., Putranta, H., & Sidik, F. (2023). Does the implementation of school zoning policies equalize the quality of education? Case study at the junior high school level. *TEM Journal*, 12(4), 2593–2602. <https://doi.org/10.18421/TEM124-71>
- Samuelsson, J. (2023). Performance and history: Elite school pupils’ views on assessment and their future in Sweden. *Education 3-13*, 51(4), 672–684. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03004279.2021.1998180>
- Shiferaw, M., & Kenea, A. (2024). Determinants of parental school choice: A systematic review of the literature. *International Journal of Indonesian Education and Teaching*, 8(1), 20–34. <https://doi.org/10.24071/ijiet.v8i1.7296>
- Simorangkir, S. T., Karnati, N., Abdullah, T., & Suhardi, M. (2019). Student culture in favorite schools. *Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research*, 343, 364–369. <https://doi.org/10.2991/icas-19.2019.75>
- SMERU. (2022). *Impact of the school zoning system to student learning outcomes in Yogyakarta*. <https://rise.smeru.or.id/en/publication/impact-school-zoning-system-student-learning-outcomes-yogyakarta>

- Janu Arlinwibowo, Sri Fajar Martono, Ikhyia Ulumudin, Hermanto Waruwu, Yufriawati, Yunita Murdiyaningrum, Gupita Nadindra Fatima, & Benjamin Leong Tack Khang
- Solihin, S., & Sara, R. (2021). Gaps in the education management in Indonesia that are not following existing laws in Indonesia. *Proceedings of the 1st International Conference on Law, Social Science, Economics, and Education*, 1–6. <https://doi.org/10.4108/eai.6-3-2021.2306886>
- Sulistiyosari, Y., Wardana, A., & Dwiningrum, S. I. A. (2023). School zoning and equal education access in Indonesia. *International Journal of Evaluation and Research in Education (IJERE)*, 12(2), 586–593. <https://doi.org/10.11591/ijere.v12i2.22488>
- Sulisworo, D. (2016). The contribution of the education system quality to improve the nation's competitiveness of Indonesia. *Journal of Education and Learning (EduLearn)*, 10(2), 127–138. <https://doi.org/10.11591/edulearn.v10i2.3468>
- Utami, A., & Ruskan, E. L. (2020). Development of decision support system for selection of yayaan alumni scholarship using MOORA method. *Advances in Intelligent Systems Research*, 172, 706–710. <https://doi.org/10.2991/aisr.k.200424.107>
- Woodfield, A., & Gunby, P. (2003). The marketization of New Zealand schools: Assessing Fiske and Ladd. *Journal of Economic Literature*, 41(3), 863–884. <https://doi.org/10.1257/jel.41.3.863>